

Testimony of William F. Henderson III  
President, Local 1298  
Communications Workers of America

Supporting Proposed Bill:

SB 417 – AN ACT CONCERNING CALL CENTERS AND THE TIMELY REPAIR  
OF PUBLIC UTILITY POLES

Energy and Technology Committee  
March 2010

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, members of the committee: my name is William Henderson III. I am proud to serve as the President of Communications Workers of America Local 1298, representing more than 5,000 telecommunications workers across New England.

I am here to speak in favor of SB 417 – AN ACT CONCERNING CALL CENTERS AND THE TIMELY REPAIR OF PUBLIC UTILITY POLES.

This is crucial legislation that is good for Connecticut consumers, Connecticut's economy, and for the hard-working professionals I represent in CWA Local 1298. Briefly, the bill has four important provisions:

1. Requires telecommunications call centers to disclose their location to consumers.
2. Allows consumers to choose to have their call re-routed to a Connecticut call center representative when possible.
3. Gives telecommunications companies with a higher percentage of customer service work in Connecticut preference in Connecticut state contracts.
4. Requires that provisions are adopted that each public service company shall follow – when a utility pole is damaged in an accident.

Let me explain why these provisions are so important. Over the past ten years, AT&T has consistently failed minimum standards set by the Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC).

During that ten-year period, more than 2,200 hourly Connecticut AT&T workers have lost their jobs, and 80% of that total have been call center representatives.

This has been a prolonged and absolute disaster for not only our members -- the dedicated, skilled employees of AT&T -- but for the people of Connecticut, who have had to put up with substandard service while paying for performance that is required by regulation, but has simply not been delivered.

When AT&T is asked to explain their poor performance they blame -- incredibly -- bad weather, which is one of the basic circumstances leading to service requests, and what they call "third party events," which boils down to problems with dispatch.

The reality is that call centers located in Ohio, Michigan and Texas simply do not have the understanding, the knowledge base and familiarity with our state that Connecticut call centers possess.

One brief example -- when a tornado touched down in Wethersfield, the Ohio call center sent out installers rather than technicians for what they believed were individual phone complaints, rather than the community emergency it actually was. Why? They simply were too far away to know that this disaster had struck. And -- when poles are damaged in any type of accident - there needs to be a procedure in place for quick, safe, repair.

This type of scenario has occurred repeatedly. AT&T would rather lower standards than live up to their commitments. But they do not mind reaping escalating profits, making more than \$16 **billion** dollars in 2009.

Finally, I believe that every taxpayer in our state would agree that when the state can, it should give preference to companies that support our communities and state economy by employing Connecticut workers. This just makes sense, especially when unemployment in our state continues to climb, and families across the state suffer.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions, and to work with the committee to see that this important legislation becomes law. I urge you to support Connecticut workers and their families, and Connecticut consumers, who deserve to get what they pay for.

---